

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2007EDU0018-000188
Feb. 28, 2007

Ministry of Education

UCLUELET OPENS STRONGSTART EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

UCLUELET – The Province marked the official opening of an early learning centre in Ucluelet elementary school as part of the first phase of a new program to help preschool children develop reading skills and get ready for kindergarten, Education Minister Shirley Bond announced today.

“Nearly one out of four B.C. kindergarten students is not developmentally ready to start school, so we need to address that,” said Bond. “StrongStart early learning centres are located in schools with underutilized space and are part of our plan to improve literacy skills so that B.C. children have the best possible start in school and in life.”

The centre takes advantage of underutilized space in Ucluelet elementary school. Many schools across B.C. have excess space as a result of declining enrolment. Since 2001, enrolment has decreased by 42,500 students provincially. Like the School Community Connections program that provides community access to existing underutilized school space, StrongStart centres turn the challenge of declining enrolment into an opportunity.

“Although we’ve only been open for a few weeks, the centre is already very popular with families,” said Ucluelet elementary school principal Vera Kaiser. “Kids are eager to be ‘coming to school,’ families are interested in being a part of the school and it is quickly helping to build a strong and positive community and school relationship.”

The StrongStart centre offers a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. A qualified early childhood educator will lead activities, including stories, music and art, to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like environment.

“This government is committed to making our province the best-educated, most literate one around, and that requires we encourage a love of learning and reading in all B.C. students right from the start,” said Bond.

This Ucluelet StrongStart Centre was awarded \$50,000 to prepare its in-school space and fund its first year of operating costs, including staff and supplies and healthy snacks. The centre will receive another \$30,000 for its second year of operation.

The StrongStart centre in Ucluelet elementary school is part of the first phase of the StrongStart centre program, which includes 16 sites and a government investment of over \$1.4 million. Last month, Premier Gordon Campbell unveiled the \$27-million first phase of ReadNow BC, government’s new literacy plan, which promised more StrongStart centres around the province and increased government’s investment to \$5 million. StrongStart centres fulfil a 2005 election promise and a throne speech commitment to use underutilized school spaces as centres to deliver early learning services.

-more-

- 2 -

The Province is committed to reaching its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Since 2001, government has invested over \$106 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs such as \$9.5 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn and \$2.7-million for the ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) program that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

-30-

Media Lara Perzoff
contact: Public Affairs Bureau
 Ministry of Education
 250 356-5963
 250 920-9040 (cell)

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.